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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the factors affecting the enrollment decisions of students accepted at Northern Essex Community College (NECC) for the fall 1983 semester. The study investigated the influence of eight categories of college- or student-related factors (i.e., general college atmosphere, physical characteristics of NECC, personalized attention, financial accessibility, academic major related factors, course accessibility, perceived quality, and transfer-oriented factors); and eight sources of information clusters (i.e., official informational sources, financial aid office, high school sources, NECC recruiting publications, friends, on-campus recruiting sources, general knowledge, and print media). Multivariate analyses of variance were conducted on data supplied by 617 respondents (66.1% of the total sample) and on data supplied by 65% of the respondents, consisting only of first-time students (N=401). The total group of students and the sub-group of first-time students were further divided by two variables: enrolled and traditional versus non-traditional. Study findings included the following: (1) there were no differences between enrolled versus not-enrolled and not-enrolled students regarding the eight factor categories; (2) enrolled students were more favorably influenced by financial aid office contact, high school sources of information, and on-campus recruitment sources than not-enrolled students; (3) non-traditional college-aged students were more favorably influenced by course accessibility than traditional aged students; and (4) first-time students did not differ substantially from students with prior experience in terms of influences on enrollment decisions.(LAL)

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# A REVIEW OF THE INFLUENTIAL FACTORS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION AFFECTING THE ENROLLMENT DECISIONS OF STUDENTS ACCEPTED TO NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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"The student decision-making process with respect to college choice is a complex, slightly understood phenomenon. It seems, however, that prospective students do want specific information and that the information does make a difference in their decisions (Mayhew, 1979:176)."

To administer an effective enrollment management plan the college needs to determine what factors, strategies, and perceptions are most important to the student consumer throughout the college choice process. An understanding of the college choice process requires an understanding of the multiple influences that affect students' decisions. Without the use of a systematic model of the influences on college choice, Chapman (1981:488) states, "colleges may overlook ways to increase the effectiveness of their recruiting, or conversely, overestimate the influences of the recruiting activities in which they do engage." Given the changing environment (changing federal support to student financial assistance, declining pool of high school graduates, and perhaps statewide entrance requirements to higher educational institutions) the management of enrollment will take on a critical importance in the near future.

Prior research indicates that information colleges provide to prospective students is often incomplete, insufficiently detailed, not clearly presented, or presented at the wrong time. Failure to provide accurate and comprehensive information to students may result in an unwise choice of college or program of study and, consequently, low student morale, high attrition rates, and future recruiting problems (Lenning and Cooper, 1978).

As a result, several major reasons existed for conducting research on the college choice decision-making process. The most obvious was a desire to obtain information to improve the college's image and position in the market place. A second goal was to provide a framework for the evaluation of existing marketing activities. With limited resources for implementing marketing strategies, it becomes necessary to identify those activities and media which are most efficient in terms of meeting institutional objectives related to enrollment. "Given the present concerns for budgeting within most institutions, the opportunity to identify the most cost-efficient programs would seem to be a prudent activity (Lolli and Scannell, 1983:137)."

This study also provided the opportunity to confirm the intuitions we held concerning why students enroll. This knowledge was necessary if we were to continue to provide the services needed and desired by our students. An institution cannot provide adequate information to prospective students until it knows specifically who needs what information.

For the college to define and contact its various market segments, it must know how the prospective students in each segment were influenced. The information can then be used to determine the groups of prospective students to be contacted, the marketing strategies to be used, and the particular programs and characteristics of the college to be emphasized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there were any differences in the influential factors and sources of information affecting enrollment decisions of enrolled students versus not-enrolled students, and if there were any differences in the influential factors and sources of information affecting the enrollment decisions of traditional age students versus non-traditional age students who were accepted for enrollment

at Northern Essex Community College for the Fall 1983 semester.

Methodology

The population investigated by this study were the "new" students accepted to Northern Essex Community College for the Fall 1983 semester. Students admitted who had to complete the English as a Second Language Courses, the Discovery Cluster, and students admitted as Unclassified were excluded because of the relatively small numbers of students in those categories and because the recruitment efforts of the college are not specifically directed toward those students.

The research design consisted of two independent variables - enrollment status and age.

Figure 1. Cell Configuration for Two Independent Variables

| | | AGE | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Traditional | Non-traditional |
| ENROLLMENT STATUS | Enrolled | 315 | 165 |
| | Not-Enrolled | 105 | 32 |

A total of 617 usable questionnaires were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance. This represented an overall response rate of 66.1%.

Students who had prior college experience at Northern Essex Community College or elsewhere, may have been influenced by their past experiences when deciding to attend Northern Essex for the Fall 1983 semester. In an effort to control for these effects, the analysis was repeated using first time students only. There were 401 first time students responding, representing 65.0% of all respondents. The 2x2 design for these students is pictured below:

**Figure 2. Cell Configuration For First Time Students**

| | | AGE: Traditional First Time | AGE: Non-Traditional First Time |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENROLLMENT STATUS | Enrolled First Time | 242 | 59 |
| | Not-Enrolled First Time | 88 | 12 |

The dependent variables were determined using maximum likelihood factor analysis with oblique rotation. Eight factor and eight source clusters were found and analyzed, and are summarized below:

Factor 1 (General Atmosphere):
General Atmosphere of the College

Factor 2 (Physical Characteristics):
Size of the College
Attractive Campus
Close to Home

Factor 3 (Personalized Attention):
Amount of Interest In Students Shown By Faculty/Staff
Possibility of Extra Help From Instructors
Small Classes/Personalized Classroom Instruction
Quality of Computer Facilities

Factor 4 (Financial Accessibility):
Overall Cost of Attendance (after Financial Aid )
Low Tuition and Other Expenses
Financial Aid Availability
Admissions Standards
Inability to Afford Cost of First Choice College
Close to Home

Factor 5 (Academic Major Related):
Employment Opportunities after Graduation
Had Specific Academic Major Desired
Academic Competitiveness of Intended Major

Factor 6 (Course Accessibility):
Scheduling of Courses
Variety of Courses Offered
Opportunity to Experiment in a College Setting
Quality of Computer Facilities

Factor 7 (Perceived Quality):
Overall Academic Reputation
Quality of Teaching

Factor 8 (Transfer Oriented):
Inability to Afford Cost of First Choice College
Good Preparation for Transfer to Another Institution

**SOURCES**

Source 1 (Official Informational Sources):
Meeting with Representatives of the College at Night/Fair
Talks by Northern Essex Representative at High School
Contact with the Academic Support Center
Contact with the Career Counseling/Placement Center

Source 2 (Financial Aid Office):
Contact with the Financial Aid Office

Source 3 (High School Sources):
High School Counselor
High School Teachers

Source 4 (NECC Recruiting Publications):
Northern Essex Academic Brochures
Northern Essex Catalog
Other Northern Essex Publications

Source 5 (Friends):
Students Currently Attending Northern Essex
Friends
Former Northern Essex Student's Advice
Advice of Family Members

Source 6 (On-Campus Recruiting Sources):
Faculty of Northern Essex
Interview with Northern Essex Admissions Office
Alumni of Northern Essex

Source 7 (General Knowedge ):
General Knowledge About the College
General College Guides and Handbooks

Source 8 (Print Media):
Division of Continuing Education Brochure
Newspaper Articles/Advertisements

A multivariate analysis of variance was used to test the six null hypotheses. When overall significant differences were suggested by the multivariate analysis at the .05 level of significance, the results of the univariate F tests were examined to determine which dependent variables revealed a significant difference. This analysis was then repeated using first time students only.

**Findings**

1. Test of Hypothesis 1

Null hypothesis 1 was formulated to test whether there are no differences between the enrolled and the not-enrolled students in the degree to which the eight clusters of factors are influential in the college choice decision-making process.



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Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,585 = 1.264, F Prob < .259).

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = .570, F Prob < .802).

2. Test of Hypothesis 2

Null hypothesis 2 was formulated to test whether there are no differences between the enrolled and not-enrolled students in the degree to which the eight clusters of sources are influential in the college choice decision process.

Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,583 = 3.503, F Prob < .001 ).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to three of the dependent variables, specifically, Source 2 (Financial Aid Office Contact), Source 3 (High School Sources), and Source 6 (On Campus Recruitment Sources). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statements can be made:

-- The enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 2 (Financial Aid Office Contact) than were the not-enrolled students.

-- The enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 3 (High School Sources) than were the not-enrolled students.

-- The enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 6 (On Campus Recruitment Sources) than were the not enrolled students.

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = 3.160, F Prob < .002 ).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to three of the dependent variables, specifically, Source 2 (Financial Aid Office Contact), Source 5 (Friends),

and Source 6 (On Campus Recruitment Sources). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statements can be made:

-- The first time enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 2 (Financial Aid Office Contact) than were the first time not-enrolled students.

-- The first time enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 5 (Friends' than were the first time not-enrolled students.

-- The first time enrolled students were more favorably influenced by Source 6 (On Campus Recruitment Sources) than were the first time not-enrolled students.

3. Test of Hypothesis 3

Null hypothesis 3 was formulated to test whether there are no differences between the traditional and non-traditional students in the degree to which the eight clusters of factors are influential in the college choice decision process.

Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,585 = 5.311, F Prob < 1.89E-006).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to two of the dependent variables, specifically, Factor 6 (Course Accessibility) and Factor 8 (Transfer Orientation). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statements can be made:

-- The non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Factor 6 (Course Accessibility) than were traditional students.

-- The non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Factor 8 (Transfer Orientation) than were traditional students.

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was rejected

at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = 3.643, F Prob < 4.22E-004).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to one of the dependent variables, Factor 8 (Transfer Orientation). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statement can be made:

-- The first time non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Factor 8 (Transfer Orientation) than were first time traditional students.

4. Test of Hypothesis 4

Null hypothesis 4 was formulated to test whether there are no differences between the traditional and non-traditional students in the degree to which the eight clusters of sources are influential in the college choice decision process.

Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,583 = 35.696, F Prob < 0.0).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to four of the dependent variables, specifically, Source 1 (Official Information Sources), Source 3 (High School Sources), Source 5 (Friends), and Source 8 (Print Media). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statements can be made:

-- The non-traditonal students were more favorably influenced by Source 1 (Official Information Sources) than were traditional students.

-- The traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 3 (High School Sources) than were non-traditional students.

-- The non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 5 (Friends) than were traditional students.

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-- The non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 8 (Print Media) than were traditional students.

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = 18.714, F Prob < 0.0).

The univariate F-tests indicate a significant difference with respect to five of the dependent variables, specifically, Source 1 (Official Information Sources), Source 3 (High School Sources), Source 5 (Friends), Source 7 (General Knowledge), and Source 8 (Print Media). A review of the means in Table 1 with respect to the dependent variables indicates that the following directional statements can be made:

-- The first time non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 1 (Official Information Sources) than were first time traditional students.

-- The first time traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 3 (High School Sources) than were first time non-traditional students.

-- The first time non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 5 (Friends) than were first time traditional students.

-- The first time non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 7 (General Knowledge) than were first time traditional students.

-- The first time non-traditional students were more favorably influenced by Source 8 (Print Media) than were first time traditional students.

5. Test of Hypothesis 5

Null hypothesis 5 was formulated to test whether there is no interaction between enrollment status and age in the degree to which the eight clusters of factors are influential in the college choice decision-making process.

Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,585 = .744, F Prob < .653 ).

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = 1.391, F Prob < .199 ).

6. Test of Hypothesis 6

Null hypothesis 6 was formulated to test whether there is no interaction between enrollment status and age in the degree to which the eight clusters of sources are influential in the college choice decision-making process.

Findings - All Respondents: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,585 = 1.872, F Prob < .062 ).

Findings - First Time Students: The hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance ( F 8,374 = .788, F Prob < .617 ).

Conclusions

There are several conclusions of this study proceeding from the findings:

1. Major segmentation efforts do not have to be made with respect to the factors of influence. The major factors which influence enrolled and not enrolled students are the same, and the factors which influence traditional and non-traditional students are similar except for concern about transfer and course accessibility.
2. Students significantly differentiate themselves as to the sources of information which provide a favorable influence. The only source cluster that was not used significantly different by one or more of the major sub-groups of the study was Source 4 (Recruiting Publications) which was always the second highest rated cluster. As a result all sources become important

and need to be examined closely so that each can be used to its own particular advantage as described below:

-- Favorable contact with the financial aid office will influence students to enroll,

-- Favorable advice from a high school source will influence students to enroll,

-- Favorable contact with on-campus recruitment sources will influence students to enroll,

-- Favorable advice from friends will influence first time students to enroll,

-- Contact with official information sources will favorably influence non-traditional students,

-- Print media will favorabaly influence non-traditional students, and

-- Non-traditional students will be more favorably influenced by general knowledge that the college exists as a community resource.

3. The first time students do not differ substantially from prior students with respect to the influential factors and sources affecting enrollment decisions. However, a review of the means in Table 1 indicates some subtle differences that can possibly be used in preparing a segmented marketing strategy.

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**Table 1. Weighted Means and Ranks - Factor and Source Clusters**

(BASED ON RESPONSES TO 1-5 RATING SCALE)
(1 - Very Negative Influence;5 Very Positive Influence)

| | ENROLLED | | NOT-ENROLLED | | TRADITIONAL | | NON-TRADITIONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK |
| Factor 1 | 3.893 | 2 | 3.730 | 4 | 3.844 | 2 | 3.892 | 4 |
| Factor 2 | 3.863 | 4 | 3.752 | 3 | 3.787 | 4 | 3.955 | 2 |
| Factor 3 | 3.787 | 6 | 3.638 | 6 | 3.706 | 6 | 3.880 | 5 |
| Factor 4 | 3.997 | 1 | 3.838 | 1 | 3.928 | 1 | 3.984 | 3 |
| Factor 5 | 3.830 | 5 | 3.778 | 2 | 3.722 | 5 | 4.046 | 1 |
| Factor 6 | 3.712 | 8 | 3.627 | 8 | 3.648 | 7 | 3.800 | 8 |
| Factor 7 | 3.712 | 7 | 3.632 | 7 | 3.616 | 8 | 3.867 | 7 |
| Factor 8 | 3.892 | 3 | 3.650 | 5 | 3.810 | 3 | 3.869 | 6 |
| Source 1 | 3.276 | 8 | 3.313 | 6 | 3.216 | 8 | 3.540 | 7 |
| Source 2 | 3.525 | 6 | 3.083 | 7 | 3.375 | 6 | 3.639 | 6 |
| Source 3 | 3.398 | 7 | 2.087 | 8 | 3.413 | 4 | 3.222 | 8 |
| Source 4 | 3.785 | 2 | 3.747 | 2 | 3.694 | 2 | 3.972 | 2 |
| Source 5 | 3.904 | 1 | 3.754 | 1 | 3.836 | 1 | 4.005 | 1 |
| Source 6 | 3.570 | 5 | 3.473 | 5 | 3.412 | 5 | 3.877 | 5 |
| Source 7 | 3.724 | 3 | 3.737 | 3 | 3.653 | 3 | 3.906 | 4 |
| Source 8 | 3.573 | 4 | 3.505 | 4 | 3.350 | 7 | 3.959 | 3 |

| | ENROLLED TRADITIONAL | | ENROLLED NON-TRAD. | | NOT-ENR. TRADITIONAL | | NOT-ENR. NON-TRAD. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK |
| Factor 1 | 3.907 | 2 | 3.864 | 6 | 3.640 | 5 | 4.038 | 3 |
| Factor 2 | 3.812 | 4 | 3.966 | 3 | 3.711 | 2 | 3.895 | 6 |
| Factor 3 | 3.752 | 5 | 3.869 | 5 | 3.558 | 7 | 3.940 | 5 |
| Factor 4 | 3.995 | 1 | 4.003 | 2 | 3.819 | 1 | 3.970 | 4 |
| Factor 5 | 3.738 | 6 | 4.029 | 1 | 3.672 | 3 | 4.128 | 1 |
| Factor 6 | 3.671 | 7 | 3.800 | 8 | 3.576 | 6 | 3.802 | 7 |
| Factor 7 | 3.650 | 8 | 3.833 | 7 | 3.506 | 8 | 4.058 | 2 |
| Factor 8 | 3.851 | 3 | 3.932 | 4 | 3.669 | 4 | 3.579 | 8 |
| Source 1 | 3.215 | 8 | 3.505 | 7 | 3.221 | 7 | 3.667 | 6 |
| Source 2 | 3.433 | 4 | 3.760 | 6 | 3.080 | 8 | 3.091 | 7 |
| Source 3 | 3.409 | 6 | 3.293 | 8 | 3.423 | 4 | 3.000 | 8 |
| Source 4 | 3.686 | 2 | 3.988 | 1 | 3.719 | 1 | 3.865 | 5 |
| Source 5 | 3.880 | 1 | 3.970 | 2 | 3.691 | 2 | 4.013 | 3 |
| Source 6 | 3.431 | 5 | 3.871 | 5 | 3.336 | 6 | 3.914 | 4 |
| Source 7 | 3.649 | 3 | 3.884 | 4 | 3.665 | 3 | 4.023 | 2 |
| Source 8 | 3.339 | 7 | 3.944 | 3 | 3.388 | 5 | 4.026 | 1 |

| | ENROLLED FIRST TIME | | ENROLLED PRIOR | | NOT-ENR. FIRST TIME | | NOT-ENR. PRIOR | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK |
| Factor 1 | 3.830 | 3 | 4.007 | 2 | 3.632 | 6 | 4.036 | 1 |
| Factor 2 | 3.842 | 2 | 3.919 | 5 | 3.713 | 4 | 3.871 | 5 |
| Factor 3 | 3.737 | 4 | 3.889 | 6 | 3.935 | 1 | 3.762 | 6 |
| Factor 4 | 3.977 | 1 | 4.079 | 1 | 3.792 | 2 | 3.970 | 3 |
| Factor 5 | 3.691 | 5 | 3.963 | 4 | 3.742 | 3 | 3.878 | 4 |
| Factor 6 | 3.685 | 7 | 3.823 | 7 | 3.598 | 7 | 3.713 | 7 |
| Factor 7 | 3.687 | 6 | 3.754 | 8 | 3.514 | 8 | 4.000 | 2 |
| Factor 8 | 3.836 | 8 | 4.005 | 3 | 3.643 | 5 | 3.674 | 8 |
| Source 1 | 3.282 | 8 | 3.260 | 8 | 3.301 | 7 | 3.389 | 7 |
| Source 2 | 3.508 | 4 | 3.569 | 6 | 3.192 | 8 | 2.800 | 8 |
| Source 3 | 3.423 | 6 | 3.280 | 7 | 3.366 | 5 | 3.563 | 6 |
| Source 4 | 3.737 | 2 | 3.874 | 3 | 3.798 | 1 | 3.585 | 5 |
| Source 5 | 4.003 | 1 | 3.907 | 1 | 3.662 | 3 | 4.020 | 1 |
| Source 6 | 3.468 | 5 | 3.762 | 5 | 3.315 | 6 | 3.900 | 3 |
| Source 7 | 3.626 | 3 | 3.903 | 2 | 3.694 | 2 | 3.868 | 4 |
| Source 8 | 3.422 | 7 | 3.804 | 4 | 3.429 | 4 | 3.923 | 2 |

| | FIRST-TIME | | PRIOR | | TRADITIONAL FIRST TIME | | NON-TRAD FIRST TIME | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK | MEAN | RANK |
| Factor 1 | 3.782 | 4 | 4.011 | 2 | 3.776 | 4 | 3.817 | 7 |
| Factor 2 | 3.811 | 2 | 3.911 | 5 | 3.759 | 5 | 4.054 | 1 |
| Factor 3 | 3.704 | 6 | 3.868 | 6 | 3.677 | 3 | 3.836 | 5 |
| Factor 4 | 3.911 | 1 | 4.023 | 1 | 3.915 | 1 | 4.009 | 3 |
| Factor 5 | 3.756 | 5 | 3.947 | 4 | 3.703 | 6 | 4.024 | 2 |
| Factor 6 | 3.561 | 8 | 3.804 | 7 | 3.619 | 7 | 3.760 | 8 |
| Factor 7 | 3.645 | 7 | 3.789 | 8 | 3.603 | 8 | 3.846 | 4 |
| Factor 8 | 3.787 | 3 | 3.948 | 3 | 3.779 | 2 | 3.835 | 6 |
| Source 1 | 3.286 | 8 | 3.277 | 8 | 3.249 | 8 | 3.617 | 7 |
| Source 2 | 3.454 | 4 | 3.443 | 6 | 3.357 | 6 | 3.923 | 4 |
| Source 3 | 3.407 | 7 | 3.330 | 7 | 3.418 | 4 | 3.182 | 8 |
| Source 4 | 3.751 | 2 | 3.830 | 3 | 3.712 | 2 | 3.964 | 2 |
| Source 5 | 3.838 | 1 | 3.928 | 1 | 3.815 | 1 | 4.043 | 1 |
| Source 6 | 3.443 | 5 | 3.781 | 5 | 3.393 | 5 | 3.690 | 6 |
| Source 7 | 3.643 | 3 | 3.897 | 2 | 3.622 | 3 | 3.772 | 5 |
| Source 8 | 3.422 | 6 | 3.825 | 4 | 3.315 | 7 | 3.941 | 3 |

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